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ABSTRACT

Has the new emphasis on process versus product led instructors to teach that the writing process is everything and the product, the finished paper, of no import? This is a lesson that not even the most orthodox believer in writing process methodology would support. The process and the product are, in fact, mutually linked, rather than mutually exclusive. Many teachers embraced "process pedagogy" partly because it freed them of the necessity of teaching grammar. And, the sort of traditional grammar teaching generally associated with instruction in composition has never been shown to improve student writing. With sentence combining, however, instructors can use grammar to teach writing. Sentence combining exercises enable students to learn about the problems a writer might face in manipulating text and--at the same time--learn about the process a writer goes through in creating text. Studies show that practice with sentence combining makes students better writers. Such an exercise can even be used without reference to any grammatical terminology in a process oriented class. It should be possible to bring together lessons about grammar and literature, process and product, and more consistently use the relationship between reading and writing to make students aware of how sentences in literature work and then ask them to create similar sentences in their own writing. Echoing Jim, teachers who believe in this possibility can call out to teachers swimming in the dangerous currents of thinking about process versus product, "Come back to the text ag'in, Huck Honey." (SAM)

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Come Back to the Text Ag'in, Huck Honey!

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At the end of a summer's Writing Project workshop, teachers often have T-shirts printed to remind them of their four-week ordeal. Usually the shirts announce the Ohio Writing Project on the back and have some remark that was made during the summer term on the front, a remark that is meaningful only to the group that knows its context. The summer before last, my group's IN comment was "My, My, My," recalling the punchline of joke that lightened one serious discussion and caught on as a recurrent motif during the workshop. These T-shirts commentaries seldom go beyond the cute and flippant.

Except last summer. At our end-of-project picnic I was surprised to look around and read on the chests of 23 or so teachers, "**O**ut **W**ith **P**roduct. **O**n **W**ith **P**rocess." This is no cute punchline to a joke; it's a pretty serious commentary on these teachers' developing belief in writing pedagogy and—I suppose—their understanding of what went on in class. Is that what they really thought the acronym for Ohio Writing Project, O-W-P, should stand for, Out With Product? Certainly we emphasized that teachers should themselves write so that they can in turn show students HOW writers go about their work. We talked about the stages of the process— pre-writing, writing, and revising. We talked about why you should not teach writing "backwards," as Elbow might comment, emphasizing correctness long before students have actually produced a viable text. We pushed fluency before correctness. I don't have to go on. You know the drill of the writing-process sergeant.

Did we teach them that the writing process is everything, that the end product, the finished paper, is of no import? I don't think that we meant to teach that lesson; nor do I think it's a lesson that even the most orthodox believer in writing process methodology would support. I've often heard Don Murray, for instance, discuss his own writing process and talk about how important it is for him as a writer to "follow a line" of text to where it leads, to listen carefully to the developing syntax on the

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page. Murray knows that the writer's material is language—sounds, morphemes, syntax, meaning— and that the process and the product are inextricably linked. As you move through the stages of the writing process, you are manipulating language, and—if you can follow the lines in your text—are being manipulated by language. As for process and product, what the old song says about love and marriage seems to be true, "you can't have one without the other." I'm afraid, though, that the message which people sometimes hear when they first learn about the writing process is that somehow process and product can be made mutually exclusive. When one comes in, the other goes out.

It's not true, of course. And I'm not sure that even those teachers who emblazoned **O**ut **W**ith **P**roduct on their chests believe that you can totally forget the product for the process. It would make a strange process indeed if you had no product to aim for. Those teachers know perfectly well that at some point you have to grade a student's essay, a product. What then could they mean by "**O**ut **W**ith **P**roduct." If I had to paraphrase what they meant, I'd say it was something like this: "My God, this process pedagogy is nice. It frees me from having to talk about grammar in student papers and frees me from diagramming sentences on the board and from having students write 5-paragraph themes and 3.8 paragraphs." To put it in a nutshell, what they likely mean by On With Process is that with writing process pedagogy they are not compelled to constrict their students' writing by teaching traditional schoolbook grammar and so-called "rhetorical forms." That is a freedom devoutly to be wished.

I think both grammar and formula are linked in the minds of teachers. But let me focus on grammar here. Most English teachers would rather teach Shakespeare than syntax. Most students would rather eat dust bunnies than diagram sentences. What's probably more important is that the sort of traditional-grammar teaching generally associated with instruction in composition has never been shown to improve student writing. If we take the word of

Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, such grammar work may even be detrimental to young writers.

Some English instructors took their word in 1963, and most still take it thirty years later. In fact, the comments by Braddock and his colleagues about the harm done by traditional grammar instruction was one of the major stimuli for the interest in sentence combining. With sentence combining, you could use grammar to teach writing. Sentence combining gave students a way to learn about the problems a writer might face in manipulating text and—at the same time—learn about the processes a writer goes through in creating text. Numerous studies showed that students who learned to "follow the line" by practicing with sentence-combining exercises became better writers.

Could sentence combining be used within a process-oriented class? I think so. Since sentence-combining is essentially a synthetic process rather than an analytic one, putting sentences together rather than taking them apart, it should not be antithetical to writing-process pedagogy. It can even be used without reference to any heinous grammatical terminology. Bill Strong's work showed that. You can follow your syntax without knowing that it's really a participial phrase or a nominative absolute leading you across the page. But students often do learn grammatical nomenclature while they're manipulating text. After all, most students are curious enough to ask the name of that -ing form they produce when they put together two little sentences like

> Grandma looked at me scornfully.
> Grandma rocked her chair back and forth in a steady rhythm.

into a larger one like

> Grandma looked at me scornfully, rocking her chair back and forth in a steady rhythm.

Nonetheless, like all pedagogical trends, sentence combining lost favor with teachers and researchers. If it wasn't antithetical to a process pedagogy, it was

taken to be, nonetheless. Even some who sang its praises in the seventies, excoriate it today. Gregory Colomb and Joseph Williams, looking back at the "sentence combining industry," assert that sentence combining apparently had the wrongheaded focus of "looking for statistically significant correlations between formal features of the text and the activities of the writers" (212). Sharon Crowley admits that sentence combining works to enhance both the textual structure and the quality of student writing. But, strangely, the fact that sentence combining seems to work is irksome to her, since, says Crowley, "nobody knows precisely why it works. That is, contemporary sentence-combining research has no coherent theoretical base" (490). Boy, you can't win for losing. Give students an activity that works to improve writing and that tries to link formal features of text with the activities of writers and you're thrown in the trash heap, rejected for accomplishing or attempting just what should be most sought after. Presumably because you can't tell people why it works or what exactly is the relation between the text and the activity of writers that a pedagogy like sentence combining seems to link.

There is a relationship between the process of writing and the product. All of us who write and read and teach writing know that. We don't need Francis Christensen or Kelly Hunt to say so. Just read the first chapter of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. In that opening chapter, Hemingway probably uses more passive sentences than in any stretch of text of similar length in his writing—almost all with Robert Cohn as the patient, the person whom things are done to. Narrator Jake Barnes tells us that Cohn boxed as an undergraduate in order to overcome the "feeling of inferiority and shyness he felt on **being treated as a Jew at Princeton**." "**He was married by the first girl who was nice to him**." "**His divorce was arranged**. . . ." "**He had been taken in hand by a lady** . . . . " I could go on with example after example of passives in that chapter.

I don't think it's an accident that Hemingway so often made Cohn the grammatical patient in passive sentences. Hemingway was trying to characterize Cohn as

someone who is more acted upon than acting. What better way to do it than with passive sentences? You know what a careful re-writer Hemingway was. Don't you think he followed the lines of text, that he used the writing process to perfect a product? I do.

"But," you might respond, "that's Hemingway, a professional writer, not one of my students." It is indeed. Nonetheless, I think your students and mine have it in them to do a lot better at manipulating text than they often do and in understanding how text is created and functions. My own composition students are pretty good writers, first-year college students who average 27 on the ACT. So let me take an example from somewhere else to illustrate how much potential students have as producers of interesting syntax.

Let's take a brief look at Dwayne, a high school sophomore Tom Romano follows through a semester (115-124). Dwayne has problems with spelling, paragraphing, and editing. He typically writes limp sentences like the following:

> [Kawasakis] are great in the Motor cross. They are worth nothing in Enduro. I fell that Kawasaki should be raced more. they keep on getting better and better.

But Dwayne is also capable of producing sentences like the following, replete with nominative absolutes and present participial phrases:

> When [my cousin Charlie] ualks, he looks like a rooster, his arms out, his head back. . . . He is constantly aggravating other kids, interrupting a game or calling them manes just to get them to chase him.

He doesn't produce a lot of sentences like those. But perhaps he would write more such cumulative sentences if he were more aware of how to follow the movement of his text. So how do you get the Dwaynes of the world to become interested in textual matters as they become more fluent writers through writing-process techniques? " Oh, God," you may be saying to yourself by now. He's going to answer that by touting sentence combining again. Actually, I'm not above doing that. But I won't right now.

Instead, I'll ask you to follow another line of thought with me about how to mesh

process with product. It begins with a book published in 1915 and re-issued by NCTE in 1963: Rollo Brown's *How the French Boy Learns to Write*. Brown was an American educator who spent the year 1912 doing what we might now call an ethnographic study of the French school system. Two of the characteristics of that pre-World War One French educational system that impressed Brown most were the integration of subject matter and the emphasis on making such things as grammar lessons useful. For grammar lessons, Brown noted, French teachers did not pull out text books; nor did they have students diagram sentences. In fact, according to Brown,

> The grammar lesson itself is usually based upon some more or less complete passage of prose that is drawn from the boy's reading. He is not, then, tempted to believe that grammar is something that has to do only with special sentences chosen to fit into a textbook. He sees that a passage which has interest and charm as literature is at the same time subject to grammatical laws, and cannot be completely comprehended without the application of these laws (103).

After showing what a grammar lesson is like when it is conducted within a literature class, Brown concludes that "there was nothing to lead the pupil to believe that grammar was a thing apart" (104).

Now, I don't mean to suggest that we integrate reading and writing by having our own students stand and recite conjugations from the verbs in Salinger or Hawthorne or pick out all the adjectives on a page of Judith Bloom, as the French student might have done. I can imagine being just as oppressed by such exercises as by diagramming sentences from Warriner. The point I'm trying to make from the Brown example is that the various elements of language study should be better integrated. When you study the characteristics of texts in literature, you can show your students how they can use the same structures in their own papers that Hemingway uses to create character traits or tone or coherence or to suggest movement or stasis.

Here's a sample of an exercise I've used with Writing Project classes in order to

explore the idea of linking literary style and writing. The literature is the first chapter from Tom Romano's unpublished young-adult novel *Blindside*. The chapter opens with two adolescents, Julie and Nick, essentially caught in the act of lovemaking when Julie's parents come home earlier than expected. The two adolescents move quickly as the car turns into the driveway.

> He pushed himself back to his knees, then his feet, frantic, pulling up and buttoning his Levi's, leaving the belt unbuckled, grabbing his letter jacket from the chair where it was draped. Julie scrambled to her feet, the rumpled blue nightgown falling to her knees. She darted about the front room grabbing the four cushions scattered on the floor, tucking them under her arms, throwing two toward each end of the couch.

Nick makes it out of the house without being caught and races through town, until, at the end of the chapter, he stands safely on a corner blocks away.

> Nick took a deep breath where he stood at the edge of uptown Medville. He looked up High Street. Cars waited at the light, ready to head his way. At the moment the light turned green and Nick instinctively stuck out his thumb, he felt something wrong. He patted his back pocket. Empty. Nick felt a sharp giving sensation in his bowels. His wallet was gone. And instantly he knew where it was—somewhere on the living room floor at Julie's.

I like to use this chapter as illustration because it's easy to understand and because its syntax has such striking contrasts. When Nick and Julie race around, frantic, they do so in present participial phrases, "pulling up and buttoning his Levi's, leaving the belt unbuckled, grabbing his letter jacket from the chair . . . ." Not only this paragraph, but the whole of the chapter is filled with these **-ing** phrases. Until the end. When Nick is thinks he's safe, he takes "a deep breath." and the participles stop. Not by magic. But because Tom Romano wants to capture movement and disarray in one place, relief in another. Tom knows how to follow his lines. When I teach this mini-lesson, I introduce the chapter with a small set of exercises that has students create sentences with participial phrases. Yes, they are sentence-combining exercises. I keep my hobby horse in the closet, close by, letting him out from time to time. I don't think you have to ride my hobby horse to make such a lesson about the relationship of process and product to work. You only have

to introduce the structures in some way, letting students understand that they can indeed produce such grammatical structures as participial phrases and absolutes or turn active sentences into passive sentences. Dwayne can do it. He uses all the same structures Tom Romano does and even Ernest Hemingway. But he probably doesn't understand when and where to go through the process of changing one kind of sentence into another in order to enhance his product. I don't think one mini lesson on participial phrases is going to solve all his writing problems. Perhaps, though, a class that consistently integrates lessons in language and literature might put him on the right path.

A recent review of Tom Newkirk's *More than Stories* relates how "Newkirk argues that the now traditional and ubiquitous concept of 'process' is an inadequate philosophical basis for a writing approach. Newkirk notes how fervent writing process teaching has created 'either/or' thinking. Key terms have been dangerously thrown into polarization. Dogma prowls many classrooms" (87). Newkirk deplores the fact that that writing classes are either process oriented or product oriented. In essence, Newkirk sees that process has been taken as the accepted standard, while product has been cast out on the fringe—dark and mysterious, perhaps even a bit fearsome. Could we be hearing that concept echoed in Out With Product. On with Process? I think so.

Years ago, Leslie Fiedler suggested that on motif running through American literature concerns the bonding of the "fringe" white male with a colored man—Natty Bumpo (the ragged woodsman) and Chingachgook (the Indian), Ishmael (the despised sailor) and Queequeg (the Polynesian), Huck (the outcast) and Jim (the black man). According to Fiedler, in their bonding, the supposed opposites create a pure, innocent, and loving archetype that transcends the accepted clichés about miscegenation. Fiedler suggests that we all long for such an impossibly mythic love in which white person and black person—doomed in adulthood to walk past each other, "eyes averted"—wrestle affectionately on the sidewalk as youths.

I don't know exactly how far I can keep this metaphor going. But I would like to dream of the day when, instead of leaving the product cast out on the fringe, we embrace it—if not innocently and purely, at least productively. We should be able to bring together lessons about grammar and literature, process and product and more consistently use the relationship between reading and writing to make students aware of how sentences work in literature and then ask them to create similar sentences in their own writing. Echoing Jim, I simply want to call out to those teachers swimming in a dangerous current, "Come back to the text agi'n, Huck Honey."

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